

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unraveling the Drivers of Teacher Exhaustion in Language Education: A Deep Drive into Internal and External Factors

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ABSTRACT

Exhaustion is a feeling sensed in different jobs, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, for various reasons. This study explored internal and external factors leading to Iranian EFL teachers' sense of exhaustion. In so doing, a basic interpretive design was used to collect data using one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The participants of the present study included 30 (15 males and 15 females) Iranian EFL teachers selected through availability sampling from universities, high schools, and language institutes in Kerman, Iran. The researcher asked the participants to answer the semi-structured interview questions individually to collect the data. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. Data analysis was conducted through qualitative thematic analysis. As revealed by the results, the following internal factors lead to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion: Lack of enjoyment, anxiety, fatigue, and lack of emotional support and respect. Moreover, it was revealed that the following external factors lead to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion: Financial problems, educational facilities, the language proficiency of students, students' low willingness to learn, students' impoliteness, annual teacher assessment procedures, results of formative assessments, and parents' behaviors. The findings have some implications for EFL teachers, students, parents, and authorities.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language; Exhaustion; Hope; Self-Efficacy; Teacher Effectiveness

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 7 January 2025 | Revised: 11 January 2025 | Accepted: 13 January 2025 | Published Online: 27 February 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i3.8338>

CITATION

Barjesteh, H., Vijayaratnam, P., Fatehi Rad, N., et al., 2025. Unraveling the Drivers of Teacher Exhaustion in Language Education: A Deep Drive into Internal and External Factors. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(3): 90–103. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i3.8338>

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1. Introduction

Teaching, particularly in a second or foreign language (L2) context, is an emotionally demanding profession that can lead to negative outcomes for educators^[1]. The issue of teacher exhaustion is multifaceted, influenced by various factors related to teachers, students, context, materials, and more. These factors can either enhance or diminish teaching effectiveness. Among these factors, teacher characteristics, particularly those related to emotional and psychological well-being, significantly affect teaching outcomes. One such characteristic that has been widely studied is exhaustion.

Exhaustion is a common issue across many professions, including EFL teaching, and stems from various causes^[2]. It is experienced emotionally or mentally through stress^[3] and is manifested in depersonalization and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. This emotional overexertion is often accompanied by negative reactions to others and negative self-evaluation^[4]. The negative impact of stress, anxiety, and distress on teacher exhaustion is well-documented^[1, 2, 5]. However, factors such as self-efficacy, critical thinking, and hope can have a positive influence in mitigating exhaustion.

According to Seferoğlu et al.^[6], the teaching profession inherently involves high levels of stress due to the pressures educators face. As Jacobson^[7] points out, teacher exhaustion can negatively impact not only their professional competence, but also their personal and social lives. Given that teachers play a pivotal role in shaping teaching effectiveness, their sense of exhaustion can weaken their performance, potentially impacting student motivation and the quality of the learning experience. The interconnected nature of EFL teaching and learning means that the behaviors and emotional states of teachers directly affect students, and vice versa. Therefore, it is critical to consider the mutual influence of both parties on the teaching-learning process.

Teacher exhaustion, particularly in the form of negative emotions, can have detrimental effects on the quality of teaching and, consequently, on students' learning outcomes. To enhance EFL teaching effectiveness, addressing teacher exhaustion is crucial. Teaching effectiveness is influenced by key competencies such as language proficiency, instructional strategies, and cultural competence, all of which significantly affect student outcomes. Language proficiency is a fundamental aspect of EFL teaching, shaping the quality

of instruction and students' language development. Additionally, effective pedagogical strategies foster engagement, while cultural competence influences classroom dynamics and teaching methods. Teachers who excel in classroom management and interpersonal relationships can create supportive environments that promote learning and student risk-taking^[8].

Given the profound impact of exhaustion on both teachers and learners, it is important to explore the internal and external factors contributing to teacher exhaustion. This study aims to identify these factors within the context of Iranian EFL teachers, where exhaustion appears to be a growing concern. Empirical evidence and field observations confirm that many Iranian EFL teachers experience significant levels of exhaustion, regardless of their age, gender, or experience. This exhaustion affects their professional lives, leading to decreased motivation, satisfaction, and commitment, as well as strained social relationships^[9, 10].

The effects of teacher exhaustion extend beyond the individual teacher, influencing student engagement and overall learning outcomes^[11]. Given the negative consequences of teacher exhaustion on both teachers and students, it is imperative to address this issue. This gap in the existing literature, particularly in the context of Iranian EFL teachers, calls for further investigation.

The motivation behind this study is to explore the internal and external factors that contribute to the exhaustion of Iranian EFL teachers. Identifying these factors can help mitigate the negative effects of exhaustion, ultimately improving teaching effectiveness and student achievement. By focusing on critical factors such as critical thinking, metacognitive awareness, anxiety, and stress, the study seeks to validate previous findings and contribute new insights. Furthermore, the results could inform teacher education curricula, enabling educators to address exhaustion in the future. Students would also benefit from these insights, as teacher well-being is inherently tied to student learning. Finally, the study may inspire new areas of research within the field of EFL teaching. Based on these considerations, the following research questions guide this study:

RQ1: What internal factors contribute to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion?

RQ2: What external factors contribute to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion?

2. Literature Review

This study is theoretically grounded in the exhaustion model developed by Maslach and Leiter^[11]. In their model, exhaustion pervades both the behavior and engagement of teachers and students alike. Specifically, the performance of both groups is, to some degree, shaped by the level of exhaustion they experience. As a natural response, students tend to adjust their perceptions and behaviors in relation to their teachers, which in turn influences their performance in the classroom. This adjustment often leads to a decrease in students' self-efficacy and a negative impact on their motivation and inspiration^[11].

Exhaustion, as defined by Maslach et al.^[12], is a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. This condition affects individuals whose jobs involve working with others, and it arises as a result of disillusionment and chronic stress. Among the key symptoms of burnout, emotional exhaustion is the most widely accepted and recognized, often manifesting as feelings of emotional overextension and fatigue^[12]. Depersonalization, another hallmark of burnout, involves adopting negative and detached attitudes toward those one is serving. This can result in emotional and cognitive distancing from others, as well as a reduced quality of service, which often leads to feelings of incompetence and dissatisfaction with one's work. Finally, a reduction in personal accomplishment is typically attributed to a lack of resources and an overwhelming workload, compounded by social conflicts^[12].

The effects of exhaustion are observable both at the individual and interpersonal levels^[9]. On an individual level, exhaustion can sap intrinsic motivation, enthusiasm, and idealism about one's career. This diminished drive manifests as feelings of concern and discouragement^[10]. Maslach and Leiter^[11] emphasize that teacher exhaustion significantly impacts both teachers' and students' actions and participation. Teachers' emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment influence their interactions with students, while students, in turn, adjust their attitudes and behavior in response to their teachers' exhaustion. As a result, students' perceptions of their efficacy in school often decrease, and their intrinsic motivation suffers, leading to reduced learning and engagement^[11].

A broad consensus among scholars supports the notion

that teacher exhaustion negatively affects teaching effectiveness. Several studies have further explored this relationship. For instance, Zha and Wang^[1] examined the link between teacher exhaustion, self-efficacy, and views on homeschooling. Their findings revealed a negative association between teachers' self-efficacy and their levels of exhaustion. Additionally, teacher exhaustion was found to correlate negatively with positive views on the practicality and effectiveness of homeschooling as a teaching method.

Klusmann et al.^[13] highlighted the significant impact of teacher burnout on students' evaluations of teaching. Teachers experiencing higher levels of burnout were more likely to receive lower ratings from students in areas such as classroom management, instructional pace, and individual support. Klusmann et al.^[13], in a descriptive study using semi-structured interviews, identified several contributing factors to teacher exhaustion, including high expectations from students, pressures from school administrators, large class sizes, and disruptive student behavior.

In a study by Zamani Rad and Nasir^[14] of 150 Iranian EFL teachers, significant differences in burnout and job self-observation were found between male and female teachers, with male teachers showing higher levels of exhaustion. This study also confirmed a negative relationship between self-observation and burnout. Soleimani^[15] explored the role of teaching methodologies in teacher exhaustion and found that teachers who employed direct teaching methods experienced higher levels of burnout compared to those using indirect approaches. Swider and Zimmerman^[16] examined the mediating role of exhaustion in the relationship between personality traits and work performance, concluding that burnout could significantly impact work efficiency.

Bayani et al.^[17] focused on gender, age, and background factors in a sample of 280 Iranian secondary school teachers, finding that male teachers were more likely to experience exhaustion than their female counterparts. Their research underscored the need for targeted interventions to alleviate teacher burnout.

Seferoğlu et al.^[6] conducted a descriptive study using the Maslach Burnout Inventory to assess teacher exhaustion, identifying key factors such as the socio-economic status of the school and the level of instruction as significant contributors to burnout. Shunging^[18] also explored the relationship between teacher exhaustion and self-efficacy, finding a

strong negative correlation between these two variables.

Research by Yaghoubi and Habibinejad^[19] and Ghazalbash and Afghari^[20] further emphasized the impact of exhaustion on teacher effectiveness, with Ghazalbash and Afghari noting a negative correlation between teacher exhaustion and reflective teaching practices. Similarly, Gholami^[21] examined the connection between self-efficacy and exhaustion in Iranian EFL teachers and found a significant negative relationship between the two. Kruijsdijk^[22] found that teachers with lower levels of exhaustion tended to foster more positive attitudes toward learning in their students.

Sanford^[23] sought to identify the factors contributing to teacher exhaustion and discovered that a lack of critical thinking and feelings of hopelessness were central to teachers' burnout. Finally, Zhao and Wang^[1] conducted a phenomenological study on emotional exhaustion among Chinese EFL teachers, revealing that occupational pressures, identity conflicts, a stressful classroom environment, and high expectations contributed significantly to teacher burnout. The study also identified several negative outcomes of exhaustion, including diminished teaching quality, burnout, and a decrease in teaching enthusiasm.

Together, these studies highlight the profound impact that teacher exhaustion can have on both educators and students, underscoring the importance of addressing burnout to improve teaching quality and student outcomes.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The study sample was picked up through availability sampling from the target population. The target population consisted of Iranian EFL teachers who were already teaching English at different educational places including universities, high schools, and language institutes of Kerman. The sample of the study included 30 (15 males and 15 females) Iranian EFL teachers whose degrees were B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in English field branches including English Language Teaching, English Translation, and English Literature and Language. They had teaching experience of an average of 10 years. They participated voluntarily in the study without any obligation. In line with the ethics of research, the objectives of the study were fully explained to the participants at the

outset of the research. Moreover, their written consent for participation in the research was taken. Also, anonymity and confidentiality of data were promised to them.

3.2. Instrument

A semi-structured interview was designed by the researcher, consisting of four open-ended questions to collect data. The questions were structured in a way that began with general inquiries and progressively moved toward more specific topics, aiming to explore teachers' perceptions of exhaustion and the factors they believe contribute to this sense of fatigue. To ensure the reliability of the data, the researcher cross-checked the interpretations with the interviewees to confirm that their responses were accurately understood and represented. To strengthen the validity of the findings, illustrative quotations were included alongside each extracted theme in the results section. The interview was conducted in English and took place in an individual format. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The communication platform used for the interviews was WhatsApp and Telegram, eliminating the need for face-to-face interaction while maintaining direct and personal engagement with participants.

3.3. Design

The objectives of this study could be best achieved through basic interpretive design. It is usually used in cases wherein the researchers want to explore the perceptions of people^[23]. Congruent with the aims of the present study, a basic interpretive design within the qualitative research paradigm was appropriate to extract the teachers' perceptions of the factors that lead to exhaustion them. In this type of design, qualitative data are qualitatively content-analyzed to extract the recurrent themes in them^[24].

3.4. Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, employing a three-step coding process: open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding involves breaking down the data into key terms or phrases, referred to as "units of analysis," which are then grouped into categories based on their shared content. In axial coding, the relationships be-

tween these categories and their respective subcategories are identified, providing a deeper understanding of how the concepts interconnect. Selective coding focuses on extracting a central, core category that best represents the underlying theme, derived from the identified categories^[24]. These three coding stages are widely recognized as standard procedures for qualitative data analysis, ensuring a comprehensive and systematic examination of the data.

4. Results

4.1. Results of the First Research Question

On the first research question (i.e., What internal factors lead to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion?) the following 4 themes were identified from thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews. For a better grasp of the emerged themes, they are depicted in **Figure 1** as follows.

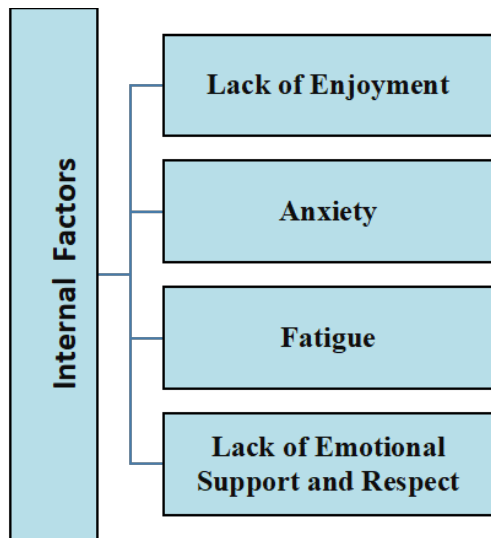


Figure 1. Emerged themes as the internal factors.

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed several internal factors contributing to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion. These factors encompass a range of emotional and psychological challenges that teachers face in their professional lives. The findings highlight four key themes that shed light on the underlying causes of exhaustion: lack of enjoyment, anxiety, fatigue, and lack of emotional support and respect. Each of these themes reflects distinct aspects of teachers' experiences and offers valuable insight into the internal struggles they encounter in their roles. In the following sections, each of these themes will be discussed

in detail to better understand their impact on teachers' well-being and their professional lives.

4.1.1. Lack of Enjoyment

The theme of "Lack of Enjoyment" emerged as a significant factor contributing to the exhaustion of Iranian EFL teachers. Many participants expressed a sense of dissatisfaction and disinterest in their teaching roles, which led to emotional fatigue. For instance, Participant 5 (P5) revealed, "I do not enjoy teaching. Teaching is not interesting for me. I do not like it. It gives me exhaustion feeling." Similarly, Participant 7 (P7) described a negative emotional state prior to classes, stating, "Teaching is so unenjoyable that I unhappily prepare myself before coming to the class. I come to the class with sadness. This is a main reason for my exhaustion." Participants shared that their lack of enthusiasm for teaching translated into a sense of sadness and emotional drain, as expressed by Participant 10 (P10): "I am usually upset when I am teaching. Teaching generates a sense of sadness in me. This makes me exhausted." Participant 14 (P14) further emphasized the absence of excitement, saying, "I teach without enthusiasm. This work is not enthusiastic for me. It is not exciting for me. I look at teaching as a boring act. This is a source of exhaustion." Lastly, Participant 11 (P11) stated, "I do not like teaching job. I go to class with no smile. I am not happy with my profession. Therefore, I become exhausted." These insights reveal that the lack of enjoyment in the teaching process significantly contributes to the emotional strain and exhaustion felt by teachers.

4.1.2. Anxiety

Anxiety was identified as another significant internal factor contributing to the exhaustion of Iranian EFL teachers. Several participants highlighted how nervousness and the fear of not meeting expectations negatively affected their emotional well-being and teaching performance. For instance, Participant 18 (P18) shared, "I sometimes feel nervous in teaching. I think that my teaching may not be what my students expect. This irritates me and causes exhaustion in me." Similarly, Participant 13 (P13) expressed concerns about their teaching abilities, stating, "I am anxious that I cannot teach well. This negative feeling reduces the quality of my teaching. It weakens my performance and makes me exhausted." The anxiety surrounding preparation was also a source of stress, as noted by Participant 20 (P20): "Becoming

prepared for teaching makes me anxious. Teaching preparation is full of anxiety. Each class needs specific preparation. This finally leads to exhaustion and burnout.” Additionally, Participant 4 (P4) discussed how the anxiety of managing large or challenging classes contributed to their exhaustion, saying, “I feel anxious when I go to crowded classes. I feel that I cannot manage them. This causes anxiety in me. Therefore I experience exhaustion.” These responses underscore the significant role that anxiety plays in creating emotional strain, which in turn leads to teacher burnout and fatigue.

4.1.3. Fatigue

Fatigue emerged as a prominent theme in the experiences of Iranian EFL teachers, with many participants describing how physical and emotional exhaustion were directly linked to their teaching roles. Several teachers reported feeling a sense of overwhelming tiredness after their classes, which contributed significantly to their overall sense of burnout. For instance, Participant 12 (P12) stated, “I feel emotionally bored and tired of teaching. Teaching makes me bored. Teaching exhausts me.” Similarly, Participant 30 (P30) expressed how fatigue became difficult to manage, noting, “I hate some things in teaching. For instance, I feel tired. Fatigue is too difficult to be controlled. Fatigue makes me exhausted.” Participant 14 (P14) described the physical toll teaching took on them, saying, “I feel tired after each class. I feel that I have done a huge amount of physical activities. This causes exhaustion.” The emotional drain of handling students also emerged as a source of fatigue for some teachers, as illustrated by Participant 1 (P1), who shared, “I feel it very hard to handle students. They really make me exhausted. I am tired of them.” Participant 7 (P7) similarly reflected on the exhausting nature of teaching, stating, “I feel tired. Teaching has no special meaning for me. I just do it as a routine. I have no interest in it. It is tiring for me.” Lastly, Participant 13 (P13) echoed this sentiment, adding, “Teaching job is not interesting for me. It is just a habit and a kind of boring activity for me. I do it because I am obliged.” These responses illustrate that the physical, emotional, and mental demands of teaching lead to significant fatigue, contributing to the overall exhaustion experienced by teachers.

4.1.4. Lack of Emotional Support and Respect

The theme of “Lack of Emotional Support and Respect” emerged as a significant contributor to the exhaustion experienced

by Iranian EFL teachers. Many participants shared their frustrations regarding the absence of emotional support from their students, which led to feelings of isolation and burnout. Participant 24 (P24) expressed this lack of support, stating, “I do not receive emotional support from others. I express my emotions to my students but they do not. This causes exhaustion.” Similarly, Participant 21 (P21) highlighted the lack of respect in the classroom, noting, “I respect my students. I talk and behave with respect with them. I talk politely with them. I do not insult them. But they do not show any respect and politeness to me.” The absence of attentiveness was also a key issue for some teachers, as Participant 3 (P3) remarked, “Students do not listen to my sayings carefully. They do not pay attention to my sayings. This makes me exhausted.” Additionally, Participant 9 (P9) pointed out the emotional disconnect, saying, “My students do not show empathy and sympathy toward me. They do not share their feelings with me. They do not sympathize with me. It is why I am exhausted.” Participant 25 (P25) echoed this concern, stating, “I do not receive emotional support from my students. Their behavior is not respectful. Lack of support leads to exhaustion.” Finally, Participant 4 (P4) emphasized the importance of mutual interaction, expressing, “I do not have mutual interaction with my students. They do not show friendly feelings toward me. It is the main reason for exhaustion.” These insights reflect how the lack of emotional connection, support, and respect from students contributes to teachers’ emotional drain, further exacerbating their feelings of exhaustion.

4.2. Results of the Second Research Question

On the second research question (What external factors lead to Iranian EFL teachers’ exhaustion?) the following 8 themes were extracted from the data. For a better grasp of the emerged themes, they are depicted in **Figure 2** as follows.

The results of the second research question, which explores the external factors contributing to Iranian EFL teachers’ exhaustion, reveal a complex interplay of challenges faced by educators in the classroom. These factors stem from various aspects of the educational environment and student behavior, which place considerable strain on teachers. The themes identified from the data include financial difficulties, inadequate educational facilities, the varying language proficiency levels of students, students’ lack of

motivation to learn, and instances of impoliteness exhibited by students. Each of these elements significantly impacts teachers' well-being, contributing to their feelings of fatigue and burnout. The following sections will delve deeper into each of these themes to better understand their role in the teachers' exhaustion.

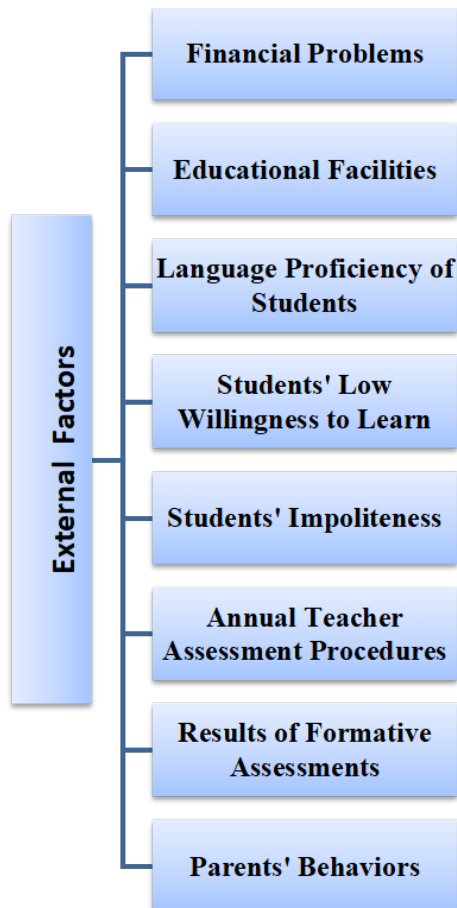


Figure 2. Emerged themes as the external factors.

4.2.1. Financial Problems

One of the major external factors leading to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion is financial problems. Many teachers report that their low wages significantly contribute to their stress and fatigue. As highlighted by participants, the insufficient salary often fails to cover even basic living expenses, leaving them struggling to meet their needs. For instance, P3 expressed that their salary was so low that it could not even sustain them for the first ten days of the month, adding to their exhaustion. P10 also pointed out the intolerability of the low wages, and P29 emphasized that the inability to fulfill basic needs due to financial constraints was a key

source of teacher exhaustion. P8 further compared their earnings to those of other professions, noting that employees in other fields, such as bank clerks, receive much higher wages, which exacerbates their feelings of frustration and exhaustion. Thus, financial insecurity is a significant external factor contributing to the burnout of EFL teachers in Iran.

4.2.2. Educational Facilities

Another significant external factor contributing to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion is the lack of adequate educational facilities. Many teachers report that limited resources and poor infrastructure in educational institutions lead to challenges in effectively teaching their students. P14 highlighted that physical resources in institutions are constrained due to budget limitations, which can result in feelings of boredom and exhaustion for teachers. P6 echoed this concern, noting that the shortage of facilities forces educators to rely on traditional teaching methods, which can be both tiring and ineffective. P20 also mentioned that the lack of basic tools, such as a stable internet connection or functioning computers, at universities leads to burnout. Additionally, P2 pointed out that the absence of essential facilities in schools directly affects the quality of teaching and contributes to teacher exhaustion.

4.2.3. Language Proficiency of Students

Furthermore, the language proficiency of students plays a crucial role in the fatigue experienced by teachers. Several participants noted that the low proficiency levels of their students lead to frustration and exhaustion. P3, for example, emphasized that the poor language skills of students often result in low evaluation scores, which adds to the teacher's exhaustion. P27 and P19 similarly shared their frustration with students' inadequate language performance, which despite teachers' hard work, results in disappointing outcomes. P5 also mentioned the mismatch between the effort invested in teaching and the low scores students achieve, leading to feelings of exhaustion.

4.2.4. Students' Low Willingness to Learn

Moreover, students' low willingness to learn English is another external factor that significantly contributes to teachers' fatigue. Many teachers expressed frustration with students' lack of motivation and interest in learning the language. P17 shared that students often complain about English

being a difficult subject, which drains the teacher's energy. P6 and P13 both highlighted that the lack of enthusiasm from students creates a challenging teaching environment, leading to exhaustion. Female P5 also pointed out that the minimal motivation students exhibit to study English is a major source of fatigue for teachers. These external factors—ranging from inadequate facilities to students' low proficiency and motivation—combine to create a stressful and exhausting teaching environment for Iranian EFL teachers.

4.2.5. Students' Impoliteness

Students' impoliteness emerged as another key external factor contributing to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion. As P14 explained, "Politeness increasingly vanishes in classes. Each year, students become less polite than the previous year. Their behavior is sometimes intolerable and exhausting." P8 also emphasized the toll of disrespectful behavior, stating, "Impoliteness of students cannot be tolerated. They do not even call their teacher politely. This contributes to exhaustion." P23 highlighted that impolite behavior extended to students' interactions with one another, saying, "A negative point frequently seen among students is that they behave impolitely. Their talking manner, their way of asking questions, and their interactions with their classmates are impolite. This makes me tired. Tiredness is accompanied by exhaustion." Finally, P17 noted the lack of basic social decorum, stating, "Politeness is really missing in the classes. They even do not know simple social principles. In such conditions, it is inevitable for me as a teacher to be exhausted." These direct quotes demonstrate how the decline in politeness among students adds significant emotional and mental strain on teachers, exacerbating their sense of exhaustion.

4.2.6. Annual Teacher Assessment Procedures

The annual teacher assessment procedures also surfaced as a significant external factor contributing to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion. Several participants expressed frustration with the subjective and inconsistent nature of these evaluations. P30 highlighted the issue of authorities' subjective behavior when assigning scores, stating, "A problematic matter for most of the teachers is authorities' subjective behavior in giving numbers to teachers in annual assessments. I'm not satisfied with the existing affairs in this regard. This really makes me exhausted." P5 further suggested that the yearly evaluations should either be eliminated

or standardized, stating, "I believe that yearly evaluation of teachers should be omitted. Or higher authorities should plan systematic procedures so that management cannot exert effect on this issue. This is exhausting." P16 described the unfairness of the process, noting, "Principals don't act fairly in their yearly evaluation procedures. They give extra scores to teachers who are their friends. I'm exhausted and bored of this unfairness." Similarly, P13 shared their frustration with the lack of consistency, stating, "An important reason for my sense of exhaustion is that there is no equality in teacher assessment by authorities. They give some teachers less scores and some, more scores, with no good reason."

4.2.7. Results of Formative Assessments

In addition to the annual assessments, the results of formative assessments also contribute to teachers' emotional exhaustion. P4 shared that low exam scores from students lead to emotional fatigue, saying, "I am exhausted emotionally because my students' class exam scores are very low. This shows that students do not study for exams. Accordingly, I became exhausted." P12 echoed similar concerns, noting, "Not only final scores but also class exam scores of students are not satisfying. They are not ready for exams. They do not consider exams as important. I feel exhausted due to these things." P3 added that even when teachers design straightforward assessments, students still fail to perform well, stating, "The performance of students in formative tests is not satisfactory. Although I do not design out-of-book questions, they do not get good scores. This makes me exhausted." Lastly, P19 pointed out the disheartening nature of low scores, saying, "Midterm scores of students are so low and weak that you think they did not have participated in any English class. They do not like English. I feel exhausted." These reflections highlight how both the unfair and subjective nature of teacher evaluations and the poor results of student assessments contribute to teachers' growing sense of exhaustion.

4.2.8. Parents' Behaviors

Parents' behaviors were also identified as a significant external factor contributing to Iranian EFL teachers' exhaustion. Many teachers expressed frustration with the lack of support or unrealistic expectations from parents. P25 stated, "Parents disturb and exhaust us very much. They don't help children in doing homework assignments." P28 also highlighted the pressure from parents, saying, "When parents talk

to me, the connotation of their saying is that I should teach differently. They expect me to teach as they like. I am tired and exhausted really.” Female participant P13 shared that parents often express dissatisfaction, stating, “Parents are always annoyed and they are not satisfied with teachers. They expect teachers to be accountable for their children’s low scores. This causes me to be exhausted.” P22 noted that some parents believe teachers are responsible for students’ poor performance, saying, “A disrupting and exhausting thing in our job is that parents think that teachers don’t teach well and this is why their children get low scores. This has really adverse effects on our work. It makes us exhausted.” These quotes reflect the additional emotional strain teachers experience as a result of parents’ unrealistic expectations and lack of cooperation, further contributing to their overall exhaustion.

5. Discussion

Concerning The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the internal and external factors contributing to the exhaustion of Iranian EFL teachers. Regarding the first research question—What internal factors lead to Iranian EFL teachers’ exhaustion?—the study identified several key internal factors: lack of enjoyment, anxiety, fatigue, and lack of emotional support and respect. These findings align with previous research, such as Ordonez’s^[25] study, which identified fatigue as a common emotional experience among English teachers. Similarly, the results resonate with the work of Khany and Ghasemi^[26], who observed a lack of emotional support and sensitivity to students as prevalent issues among Iranian EFL teachers. Moreover, Derakhshan et al.^[27] highlighted that anxiety is a common challenge experienced by Iranian EFL teachers, which is consistent with the findings of the present study.

To delve deeper into the issue of lack of enjoyment, it is important to note that enjoyment in teaching is often linked to a teacher’s intrinsic motivation and passion for the profession. If a teacher chooses their profession due to external pressures or obligations rather than a genuine interest in teaching, it is expected that they will struggle to find enjoyment in their work. This lack of enjoyment becomes particularly apparent when teachers who once found satisfaction in educating others—by helping students break free

from ignorance—no longer feel the same sense of fulfillment. This paradox highlights the complex nature of teaching as a profession: while it can be highly rewarding, it can also lead to a sense of dissatisfaction when the emotional and motivational elements are absent.

Regarding anxiety, teaching is inherently a high-stress profession, and anxiety is a prevalent emotion due to factors such as fear of failure, classroom management difficulties, and the pressures of supervision. Although one might assume that the anxiety would decrease with time and experience, this is not always the case. The challenges and unpredictable nature of teaching often exacerbate anxiety, as teachers constantly confront new situations, manage diverse classroom dynamics, and navigate complex student needs. Thus, while teaching experience may provide some coping mechanisms, anxiety remains an enduring challenge for many educators.

When examining fatigue, the findings suggest that exhaustion in teaching is driven by a combination of factors, including student behavior, low salary, the need for class preparation, lack of resources, and personal challenges. Fatigue is often seen as an inevitable part of the teaching profession; however, it is concerning that some teachers experience levels of fatigue that are intolerable and affect their mental and physical well-being. This highlights the urgent need to address the underlying factors contributing to teacher burnout to prevent long-term negative consequences.

Finally, lack of emotional support and respect emerged as a critical factor in teacher exhaustion. Teaching is a relational profession that thrives on mutual respect and emotional support between teachers and students. As Isaei and Barjesteh^[28] argue, effective teaching cannot take place in the absence of these emotional elements. When teachers feel unsupported or disrespected, their emotional energy is drained, leading to burnout. Teachers not only require support from students but also from the wider educational community, including colleagues and administrators. Without this emotional foundation, teachers may struggle to remain motivated and engaged in their work.

Turning to the second research question—What external factors lead to Iranian EFL teachers’ exhaustion?—the study identified several key external factors: financial problems, inadequate educational facilities, the language proficiency of students, students’ low willingness to learn, students’ impoliteness, annual teacher assessment procedures,

results of formative assessments, and parents' behaviors. These external factors reflect the broader socio-economic and institutional challenges that Iranian EFL teachers face on a daily basis. The findings are consistent with Derakhshan et al.^[27] who identified monetary and material factors, as well as lack of support, as major contributors to teacher exhaustion. Additionally, the current study supports Carbonneau et al.^[29], who found that the behaviors of stakeholders, including students and parents, influence teacher emotions. However, the factors of annual teacher assessment procedures and formative assessment results were unique to this study, as these issues were not widely discussed in previous research.

These findings can be justified by recognizing that while the degree of exhaustion may vary among teachers, the underlying factors affecting teacher burnout are often shared across individuals. From a psychological perspective, certain factors—such as financial stress and stakeholder behaviors—are universally influential. For instance, monetary concerns are pervasive in teaching, as teachers often face insufficient salaries that hinder their financial security. The importance of financial stability in any profession is undeniable, and teaching is no exception. Similarly, the behavior of stakeholders, whether impolite students or demanding parents, can demotivate teachers and lead to exhaustion. Teachers, like employees in other sectors, are affected by the attitudes and expectations of those around them, which can undermine their motivation and well-being.

Students' proficiency and willingness are also significant external factors that directly impact teachers' levels of exhaustion. Teachers see student success, particularly in terms of language proficiency, as a reflection of their teaching effectiveness. When students fail to meet expectations, teachers experience frustration and fatigue. Likewise, students' lack of interest in learning can lead to demotivation for teachers, as their efforts to engage students seem futile. This sense of frustration is compounded when teachers feel they are not making progress in fostering students' academic growth.

Assessment and evaluation processes are particularly exhausting for teachers, as they are subject to scrutiny and judgment. This study found that both annual teacher assessments and formative assessments contribute to teacher exhaustion, which aligns with previous studies by Xu and

Jia^[5], and Zhao and Wang^[1]. These assessments often carry emotional weight for teachers, who may feel judged based on factors outside their control, such as students' performance or subjective evaluation criteria. The impact of unfairness and subjectivity in evaluation is especially pronounced, as teachers perceive these practices as demoralizing and stressful.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the multifaceted nature of teacher exhaustion, which arises from both internal and external factors. While some factors, such as anxiety and lack of emotional support, are intrinsic to the teaching profession, others, such as financial issues, inadequate facilities, and assessment procedures, are external challenges that must be addressed by policymakers and educational administrators. By recognizing and addressing these factors, it may be possible to mitigate the negative effects of teacher burnout and promote a healthier, more supportive teaching environment.

6. Conclusions

Teacher exhaustion undeniably plays a significant role in undermining teachers' motivation, limiting their capacity for professional growth, and diminishing their effectiveness in the classroom. As such, it directly impacts not only the well-being of teachers but also the quality of education they provide. Based on the results of this study, it is concluded that teachers must actively seek to enhance their sense of enjoyment in the profession and find effective ways to manage and reduce their anxiety. By engaging in activities such as sports, extracurricular pursuits, music, and other forms of self-care, teachers can alleviate some of the emotional burdens they experience, ultimately leading to a reduction in exhaustion. Additionally, the findings underscore the critical importance of emotional support and respect from students. Teachers who feel supported and respected are more likely to remain motivated and engaged in their work, while a lack of respect can contribute significantly to teacher burnout.

The factors influencing teacher exhaustion are diverse and multifaceted, spanning personal life stressors, financial concerns, student behaviors, parental involvement, and the broader educational system, including evaluation procedures. This complexity highlights that teacher exhaus-

tion cannot be attributed to a single factor or reduced to a one-dimensional issue. Rather, it is a dynamic, multi-dimensional construct shaped by numerous interconnected elements. Therefore, policymakers and educational authorities must adopt a holistic approach when addressing teacher exhaustion, considering the various external and internal factors that contribute to it. By doing so, they can help mitigate the negative effects of exhaustion, ensuring that teachers can perform at their best and sustain their commitment to the teaching profession.

The significance of addressing teacher exhaustion is evident, as it directly affects the quality of teaching. When teachers are exhausted, their effectiveness diminishes, leading to poorer learning outcomes for students, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Consequently, reducing teacher exhaustion is not just beneficial for teachers themselves, but it also enhances the overall educational experience for students. Motivated, energized teachers are more likely to inspire and engage their students, creating a positive feedback loop that fosters greater academic achievement and language proficiency.

In sum, this study concludes that teacher exhaustion is a complex, multi-dimensional issue that arises from a combination of internal and external factors. These factors must be addressed collaboratively by various stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, educational authorities, and the broader community. By fostering a more supportive and respectful environment for teachers, we can create a sustainable teaching profession that minimizes exhaustion and maximizes both teacher satisfaction and student success. The results of this study emphasize the need for a collective effort to support teachers, as this will ultimately contribute to a healthier, more productive educational environment where both teachers and learners can thrive.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of teacher exhaustion, expanding the existing body of knowledge on this topic. The findings provide new insights into the complexities of teacher exhaustion by identifying a range of internal and external factors that contribute to EFL teacher burnout. The research highlights the intricate interplay between emotional, professional, and environmental variables that shape teachers' experiences and well-being.

Additionally, this study sheds light on the nature of teacher exhaustion as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that cannot be reduced to simple cause-and-effect relationships. These findings underscore the importance of viewing teacher exhaustion not as an isolated issue but as part of a larger, interconnected system involving multiple stakeholders, each of whom has a role in supporting teachers. This deeper understanding of teacher exhaustion provides a foundation for future research exploring new strategies and interventions to mitigate burnout and enhance teacher well-being.

6.2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study carry several important practical implications for various stakeholders in the education sector.

For EFL Teachers: The results offer valuable insights for teachers seeking to reduce their levels of exhaustion. By acknowledging the internal factors contributing to their burnout, such as lack of enjoyment and anxiety, teachers can take proactive steps to manage their emotional and professional well-being. Engaging in self-care activities, cultivating a positive mindset, and seeking professional development opportunities can help teachers alleviate stress and maintain motivation. Additionally, by recognizing the importance of emotional support and respect from students, teachers can work to create a more positive and supportive classroom environment that fosters mutual respect and enhances their overall teaching experience.

For EFL Students: Students play a crucial role in creating a positive classroom environment. The findings suggest that students can help reduce teacher exhaustion by demonstrating respect, politeness, and a willingness to engage in the learning process. By fostering a respectful and collaborative atmosphere in the classroom, students can contribute to teachers' well-being, ultimately benefiting their own educational outcomes as well. Educators may also encourage students to communicate openly about their learning needs and challenges, fostering a more supportive and effective relationship between teachers and students.

For Parents: Parents' behaviors and expectations have a significant impact on teacher well-being. The findings suggest that parents should strive to maintain reasonable expectations regarding their children's performance and avoid placing undue pressure on teachers. By demonstrating re-

spect for teachers' expertise and supporting them in their efforts to educate their children, parents can help reduce the emotional strain that teachers experience. Parents can also play a role in fostering positive student behavior and encouraging their children to take responsibility for their learning, further easing the burden on teachers.

For Educational Authorities: Policymakers and administrators have a key role in reducing teacher exhaustion by addressing the systemic factors that contribute to burnout. This includes ensuring fair and transparent evaluation procedures, providing adequate financial compensation, improving educational facilities, and offering professional development opportunities that support teachers' emotional and professional growth. Educational authorities should also prioritize creating an environment where teachers feel respected, supported, and valued. By recognizing the diverse factors contributing to teacher exhaustion, authorities can implement targeted strategies to reduce burnout and enhance teacher satisfaction, ultimately leading to better teaching outcomes.

For Future Research: The results of this study also open new avenues for future research on teacher exhaustion. Researchers can build on the findings to further explore the relationships between internal and external factors and teacher well-being. Additionally, future studies could examine the effectiveness of specific interventions aimed at reducing teacher burnout, such as mindfulness programs, peer support networks, and workload management strategies. By expanding the scope of research on teacher exhaustion, scholars can provide valuable insights into how the education system can better support teachers and create a more sustainable teaching profession.

In conclusion, teacher exhaustion is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach to address. The findings of this study highlight the need for collaboration among all stakeholders in the educational system to reduce burnout and improve the overall quality of teaching. By providing emotional support, fostering respect, and addressing systemic challenges, we can create an environment where teachers feel empowered and motivated, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes for students. This study serves as a call to action for all those involved in the educational process to prioritize teacher well-being and invest in strategies that promote a healthier, more effective teaching profession.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, H.B. and P.V.; methodology, H.I.; software, M.G.R.; validation, H.B., N.F.R. and H.I.; formal analysis, H.G.; investigation, H.B.; resources, P.V.; data curation, M.G.; writing—original draft preparation, H.I.; writing—review and editing, H.I.; visualization, H.G.; supervision, H.B.; project administration, N.F. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of Ayatollah Amoli Branch of Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran.

Informed Consent Statement

All participants provided informed consent before taking part in this study. They were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participation was entirely voluntary, with participants free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. All collected data were treated with strict confidentiality and used exclusively for the purposes specified in the research.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank the participants for contributing to this study and the INTI International University, Nilai 71800, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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